

## Blandford Cemetery

This article is one of a series of articles developed under the editorship of LTC (Ret.) John R. Kennedy, III as part of Preservation Petersburg's Peter Jones Trading Station Initiative in 2012-14. Many of the articles served as source materials for the "Petersburg Moments in Time" broadcast series produced by Professor Dan Roberts.

Blandford Cemetery is the second largest cemetery in the Commonwealth of Virginia, surpassed only by Arlington National Cemetery outside Washington, D.C. Approximately 14 years after the Episcopal Church in Petersburg moved from Blandford Church to the site of the current courthouse in downtown Petersburg, the city purchased the abandoned church building and four surrounding acres in 1819 to establish a cemetery. In 1851, the city directed that a portion of the cemetery be set aside as "a burying ground for persons of color." The cemetery is still an active burial ground, covering 189 acres, and "contains one of the finest collections of cast and wrought iron fences in the United States."

People from all walks of life have been interred at what is now Blandford Cemetery for over 300 years. Just outside the entrance to the church is the oldest marked grave in the cemetery: R. Yarborough's tombstone dated 1702. Among the multitude of characters buried in Blandford is Hiram Haines, editor of the *Petersburg Star* and good friend of Edgar Allen Poe, who died of "bilious pleurisy" on January 14, 1841, at the age of 38. Poe and his 13-year old cousin and wife, Virginia Clemm, spent their two-week honeymoon on the second floor of Haines's business at 12 West Bank Street in 1836. Haines and his wife Mary are buried next to each other close to the western wall of the cemetery.

Another grave in Blandford Cemetery belongs to Francis Antomatti, who died from love spurned. Born in Corsica (like Napoleon), he loved a beautiful woman named Farnerina, but she did not return his affection. On the evening of July 31, 1844, he entered Blandford Church and slit his throat. His tombstone reads, "Honor was his only vice."

The two Virginia governors who are buried at Blandford were both buried in 1927. Governor William Evelyn Cameron served as the state's chief executive from 1882 to 1886. He was born in Petersburg in 1842 and lived in Petersburg for part of his adult life. He was buried

near Confederate Major General and later U.S. Senator William (Billy) Mahone's gravesite. William Hodges Mann was in office from 1910 to 1914. During the Civil War Siege of Petersburg, future Governor Mann was a spy behind Union Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's lines. He died in Petersburg in 1927.

The graves of soldiers from six wars are buried at Blandford Cemetery. The only British Revolutionary War general buried in the United States, Major General William Phillips, died in the Bolling residence of East Hill on May 13, 1781. He was buried in the cemetery at night to conceal the location of his grave. Thomas Jefferson stated that Phillips was "the proudest man of the proudest nation on earth."

The Bollings were the most important family in the early history of Petersburg. Their wealth and prominence is best demonstrated by the impressive mausoleum of Robert Bolling in Blandford Cemetery. He was a captain in the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War and built Centre Hill Mansion, one of Petersburg's most historic homes, in 1823.

The Cockade City Monument in the cemetery honors Captain Richard McRae, who commanded the Petersburg Volunteers during the War of 1812. The monument originally was topped by a gilded, cast iron eagle. After being damaged by a Union artillery shell during the siege and stolen in the 1990s, the eagle is now safely housed in the Blandford Cemetery reception center.

Private Thomas L. Whitefield of the 50th North Carolina Infantry Regiment died of chronic diarrhea in the North Carolina Hospital in Petersburg in February 1863. His widow sent a friend to Petersburg to retrieve the remains of her husband. Unfortunately, he came back empty-handed since he did not have the money to pay for the body to be exhumed. Private Whitfield's body remains buried in Blandford Cemetery.

By the end of June 1864, a mere two weeks after the Siege of Petersburg began, it was too dangerous to conduct daytime funerals at Blandford. So the dead were buried at night in the cemetery, in church yards, or in other locations. The famous Banister family from Petersburg

lost their son at the battle of Burgess's Mill in the fall of 1864. During a suspension in the shelling, the family buried him at Blandford. On that same day, they buried another son in the cemetery who had died of disease during the summer and had been temporarily interred in the family garden.

Thomas Wallace, at whose home President Lincoln and General Grant conferred on April 3, 1865 and the end of the siege, is buried in Blandford. His wife's first cousin, Lieutenant General A.P. Hill, was killed in the fighting the day before. He is buried in Richmond under a monument to his memory.

Three Confederate generals are buried at Blandford: Billy Mahone, Brigadier General Cullen Battle, and Brigadier General David A. Weisiger. Generals Mahone and Weisiger successfully led the counterattack on July 30, 1864, to recapture the Crater and re-establish the Confederate defensive lines. General Battle was elected to Congress in 1868 but refused to serve. Only 2,025 known Confederate soldiers are buried at Blandford, but approximately 30,000 Confederate soldiers are buried in mass graves.

In April 1866, Nora Fontaine Maury Davidson became a founding member of the Ladies Memorial Association. Two months later she instituted the first Memorial Day observance in Petersburg at Blandford Cemetery. The large Soldiers Monument was dedicated in 1890 by Lucy Lee Hill, daughter of Lieutenant General A.P. Hill.

Among the annual events that occur at the cemetery are the celebration of the Battle of Old Men and Young Boys and guided nighttime tours on Halloween. The Ladies Memorial Association commemorates the June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1864 battle in which approximately 125 Petersburg citizens in a local home defense unit bravely defended the city against over 1,000 Federal cavalry under Brigadier General August V. Kautz. The Battle of Old Men and Young Boys program includes a guest speaker and the reading of the names of the 15 killed during this battle. On Halloween, guided tours with lanterns are conducted after dark as historic personages come back to life at their gravesites and tell their stories. Guided tours of the Blandford Church and Cemetery are available.